

# Venture puts pressure on discounters

PHOTO COURTESY OF VENTURE STORES

## Retail chain will open 6 stores here Monday

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Regional retailer Venture Stores rolls into the Houston discount store market Monday packing a six-store opening that already is making competitors take notice.

Although the move will put pressure on the competition, Venture's addition likely will be a bonanza for Houston shoppers as established players act to protect market share against the newest value pricer.

Julian Seeherman, Venture chairman and chief executive officer, said the move into Texas was a natural for the midwestern chain based in O'Fallon, Mo.

"In our studies we saw Texas as a market with enormous opportunity," he said. "It is relatively low in discount square footage, and it has enough cities to build stores within 500 miles of our distribution center."

In preparation for its move into Texas, Venture established a 350,000-square-foot distribution center in Corsicana, the third for the 93-store chain.

It will handle Venture's first 10 Texas stores, which include four opening Monday in the Dallas area, and is designed so it can be more than doubled in size to handle distribution for the 50 stores Venture wants to establish in Texas by 1997.

Seeherman said Venture plans to establish at least 12 stores in the Houston area "as fast as we can." He sees the market supporting up to 15.

Venture will face formidable challengers in just its segment of the retail spectrum in its move into Houston:

■ Kmart moved into the Houston market in the early 1960s and established a dozen stores before the end of the decade. The nation's No. 2 retailer now operates 33 stores in the Houston market, 17 of which have been refurbished since 1990 as part of the company's \$3 billion store renewal program.

■ Target too is firmly entrenched, opening its first two Houston stores in 1969. It has continued to expand to its current 16-store presence.

■ Wal-Mart has been on an expansion mode in the Houston area since opening its first suburban stores in the early 1980s. With about 20 stores in the Houston area, it just finished moving three local stores to 120,000-square-foot-plus locations, has expansion under way in two more and is building its first neartown location on Westheimer near Dunvale.

Beyond traditional mass merchandisers, a plethora of stores playing in the discount arena

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